



Home > Campaigns >

Michael Roth, Ex-Small Business Administration Leader, Makes NJ-7 Campaign Official



NJ-7 Democratic candidate and former Small Business Administration official Michael Roth. (Photo: Michael Roth for Congress).

Michael Roth, ex-Small Business Administration leader, makes NJ-7 campaign official

Millburn native joining Democratic primary to take on Kean



By Joey Fox, April 17 2025 6:00 am

Michael Roth, a New Jersey native and community investment expert who served briefly atop the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) under Joe Biden, is setting his sights on a new mission: flipping a GOP-held seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Roth is announcing this morning that he's joining the already-crowded Democratic primary field for New Jersey's 7th congressional district, a seat currently held by two-term Rep. Tom Kean Jr. (R-Westfield) that could be critical to determining control of the House in 2026. (Roth's interest in the race [had previously been reported](#) last week.)

Speaking with the New Jersey Globe, Roth said that he was ultimately spurred into running after watching congressional Republicans, among them Kean, go along with President Donald Trump in recent weeks on his rollercoaster tariff policies and on a budget bill that could lead to huge cuts to Medicaid and other programs.

"House Republicans have done absolutely nothing to hold the president in check. They are viewing him as a king," Roth said. "And it made me feel incredibly strongly that, right now, we need somebody who's got the experience to stand up for what's right, and the guts to take on someone who wants to be a king."

Roth is far from the only Democrat who's looking to beat Kean in one of the country's most evenly divided districts. Three other serious Democratic candidates – former Navy helicopter pilot [Rebecca Bennett](#), former Summit Councilman [Greg Vartan](#), and former Forward Party leader [Brian Varela](#) – have launched campaigns in recent months, and a handful of others are actively eyeing the race.

The crowd of declared and prospective candidates is reminiscent of the 2018 race for the same district, when seven Democrats lined up for the opportunity to unseat Rep. Leonard Lance (R-Clinton). The field ultimately winnowed after a critical mass of county party organizations [endorsed Tom Malinowski](#), who went on to win both the primary and general elections – but with the county line now gone and the power of county parties decreasing, this cycle's contest could remain competitive all the way to primary day.

Roth was raised in Millburn, an Essex County suburb that was part of the 7th district for many years (though it's since been shifted into a neighboring district). After getting degrees from Lehigh University and the Wharton School, Roth went into the housing and small business investment field; early on in the Biden administration, he served as the interim leader of the Small Business Administration while Biden's nominee was awaiting Senate confirmation.

(Roth's background at the SBA is notable in part because it likely gives him D.C. political and fundraising connections that his Democratic foes lack, and also because it has echoes of prior successful New Jersey

candidates; Malinowski, Josh Gottheimer, and Andy Kim all worked in the Obama or Clinton White Houses before unseating Republican congressmen.)

Much of Roth's career was spent in New Jersey, he said, and earlier this year he moved to Westfield, Kean's hometown and one of the biggest towns in the 7th district. Roth also said that he's stepped back from his role at Next Street, the community investment firm where he's worked for a decade, in order to focus fully on his run for Congress.

To do so, he's brought on Noah Dion, who ran Andy Kim's successful 2024 campaign for U.S. Senate, as his campaign manager. And he said that in the week-and-a-half since he made his interest in the race known, he's gotten a "huge wave of support" from people encouraging him to run.

With the Democratic primary still in its early stages, it's far too early to say what the political and ideological divides between the candidates will end up being. The field itself remains in flux; Roth, Varela, Vartan, and Bennett may all be in, but two others – Disney executive James Filippatos and physician Tina Shah – are also looking at the race and the past two nominees for the seat, Tom Malinowski and Sue Altman, remain politically active in the district.

Roth said that one of his chief focuses as a congressman would be to ensure that New Jersey, which [sends more tax dollars to Washington](#) than it receives in return, gets a fairer share of federal funding. And while he, like most Democrats running for anything this year, said that the 7th district needs someone willing to take on Trump, he also argued that a focus on resistance to the exclusion of all else is the wrong path to take.

"I think we have lost our way a bit in just blocking Trump," Roth said. "We can't be fooled by the distractions that he's putting out there – we have to be charting out our own vision for America."

"The vision that Trump is putting out there is, 'We should be scared and fearful of everybody. We need to isolate ourselves. We need to protect what we have,'" Roth continued. "That is not America. That is not the future of America. It's not just the future of the Democratic Party that we have to show; it's the future of America, because neither party is giving the American people a clear sense of what we stand for."

The 7th district, which stretches from the well-to-do suburbs of Union County in the east to the rural reaches of Warren and Sussex Counties in the west, did in fact narrowly go along with Trump's vision for America last year. The district, which had voted for Joe Biden in 2020, backed Trump over Kamala Harris by a [49%-48% margin](#), and re-elected Kean over Altman 52% to 46% after the [most expensive House race](#) in New Jersey history.

But that presidential topline still made the 7th district one of the closest in the country, and Democrats are already signaling they plan to focus on flipping it back in 2026. Kean has spent his long political career as a generally moderate Republican, but he also has declined to break from Trump in any real way – and Roth said that's an opening for Democrats like him looking to take Kean down.

"New Jersey deserves better than that," he said. "We deserve better than a representative who is just a rubber stamp for Trump." 

Spread the news:



RELATED ARTICLES



Kean administration official, labor leader die

 January 4, 2019



Michael Glassner losing top Trump campaign post, report says

 July 1, 2020



Muller will head NJ Bloomberg campaign

 January 13, 2020

 Tagged Michael Roth, Thomas Kean Jr.

 Enter your email address

Signup



FOLLOW US





EDITOR: DAVID WILDSTEIN - DAVID@NJGLOBE.COM STATEHOUSE REPORTER: JOE SEEWALD - JOE@NJGLOBE.COM

WASHINGTON, D.C. REPORTER: JONATHAN D. SALANT

GENERAL MANAGER & ADVERTISING: KEVIN SANDERS - KEVIN@NJGLOBE.COM



MAYFAIR MEDIA

ABOUT US

ADVERTISE WITH US

TERMS & CONDITIONS

PRIVACY POLICY

